

HOW TO... Create text effects

Stunning graphics often rely not just on the pictures but also the words you use. Adam Banks explains how to use Photoshop Elements to give text character

A picture may be worth a thousand words, but unless it's accompanied by some text it may be difficult for people to know what they are looking at. If you are going to accompany your finely crafted graphics with some words – perhaps the title of the CD whose cover artwork you're designing or the message on the greetings card you're making – then you should put the same amount of creativity into the lettering.

Most graphics programs come with effects that you can apply quickly to text, and cheap or free graphics utilities provide more enhancements. Microsoft Word has WordArt, but this can turn a headline into something as ugly as it is mind-numbingly predictable. Here we show you how to use Photoshop Elements to produce five attractive text effects. We used version 5, but the same steps will work in earlier versions. Best of all, because you are creating the text effect yourself rather than relying on a one-click preset template, you can experiment and combine effects to produce original results.

Not all text lends itself to fancy effects. Anything more than a couple of words is usually best left plain, unless you're aiming to simulate something like an ancient manuscript. Most effects won't be properly visible on lettering smaller than about a centimetre tall, and larger is better for the results to be fully appreciated. There are exceptions, but as a rule skinny, spindly or spiky text won't take effects well. A fairly

bold typeface with mainly curved edges, rather than hard squared shapes, is your best bet. For our examples, we used a lower-case g in Adobe Caslon, set at 150pt.

You need to remember to set your document's dimensions and resolution to match your intended output. We set the resolution to 300dpi for high-quality printing. You can make these settings when you create a new document via File, New (or by pressing Ctrl-N) or change them later by going to Image, Resize, Image Size (or pressing Alt-Ctrl-I).

Live effects such as Photoshop Elements' Layer Styles can be applied directly to text, which means that you can still edit the words later. However, in other situations you will need to convert the text to an image (a process called rasterising) in order to apply filters such as Blur.

Having done this, you cannot change the words, so make sure that you check all spellings before you rasterise. Unlike editable text, which is stored as vectors, rasterised text is a bitmap, so you'll suffer loss of quality if you later resize it, particularly if you try to scale it up. The trick is to get the resolution and dimensions right in the first place.

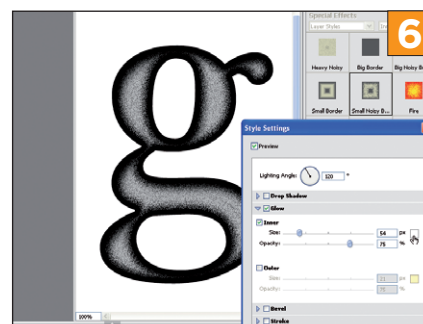
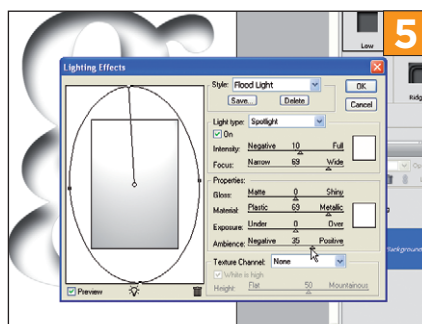
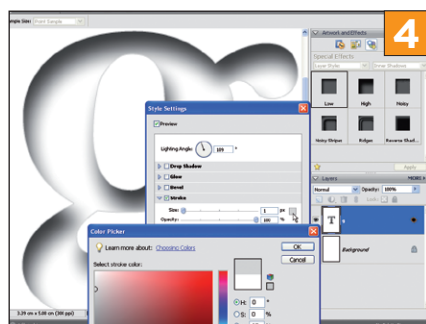
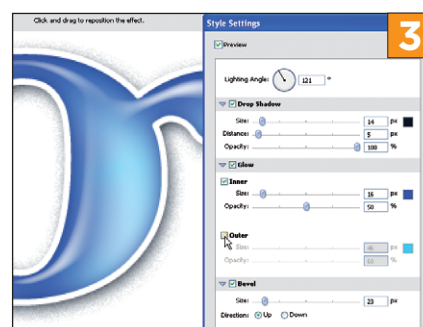
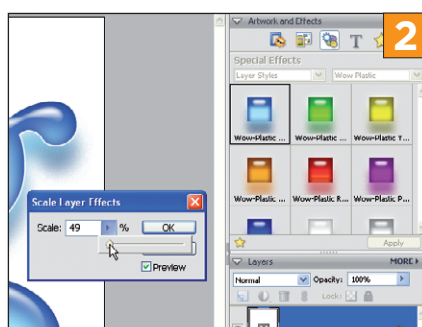
1 Create your lettering on a suitably sized canvas using Photoshop Elements' Type tool. Here we're using a single character as an example. It's generally best to start with solid black text on a white background. This gives

you the maximum contrast, and you can apply colour later. Leave some room between the text and the edge of the canvas.

2 Photoshop Elements' Layer Styles can produce great effects, but you can't rely completely on the preset options. In version 5, Layer Styles are tucked away in the new Artwork and Effects palette; you can choose this from the Window menu if it isn't visible. Click on the 'wheel' icon to get the Special Effects pane. As in previous versions, you can then choose Layer Styles from the first drop-down menu and pick a set of effects from the second. The three 'Wow' sets live up to their name. Here we have selected Wow Plastic. Double-click on the thumbnail you want. We've chosen Wow-Plastic Aqua Blue.

You'll probably find that the result looks disappointing and nothing like the thumbnail. You need to go to Layer, Layer Style, Scale Layer Effects. This lets you adjust the effect to suit the size of your lettering. Tick the Preview option and alter the Scale until you are happy with the effect and then click OK.

3 One welcome addition in Elements 5 is control over your layer styles – at least, certain aspects of them. Go to Layer, Layer Style, Style Settings to fiddle with the sliders. Untick Stroke to remove the pointless outline that's included in Wow effects, or increase its Size to make a feature of it. To make the shadow



actually look like a shadow, reduce the Drop Shadow Size and Distance. Change its colour to grey by clicking the colour swatch and making it black, then adjusting the Opacity. If the shadow still looks coloured, untick Outer Glow.

4 For the next effect, you need to return to your plain black lettering. In the Special Effects pane of Artwork and Effects, with Layer Styles still selected in the first drop-down menu, switch the next drop-down menu to Inner Shadows. Double-click on the Low thumbnail. Nothing seems to happen, because the shadow is overlaid on your black lettering. Assuming you still have the Type tool active, click the triangle to the right of the Color swatch in the Tool Options bar at the top and pick white.

Your lettering should now look as if it has been cut out of the canvas, but this will only be an approximation. In Layer, Layer Style, Style Settings, adjust the Lighting Angle so it's coming from almost directly above. It would be good to adjust the shadow's size and position, but Adobe has hidden these settings to make you buy the full version of Photoshop. However, you can tick Stroke and set Size to 1 pixel and Opacity to 100%. Then click on the colour swatch to the right and set it to a pale grey; make the first three numbers 0, 0, 85.

5 This gives thickness to the paper from which your lettering is supposed to be cut out, but it still has no surface texture. In the Layers palette, click on Background to select this, then go to Filter, Render, Lighting Effects. From the Style drop-down menu, pick Flood Light. In the diagram on the left, enlarge the light's oval to cover the whole canvas. Using the sliders, reduce Intensity to about 10 and Ambience to 35 for a subtle effect.

6 There are various ways to make text look as if it has been carelessly printed, including Filter, Sketch, Photocopy. However, for a great letterpress-style effect that keeps the text editable, try another Layer Style. Starting

again from plain text, choose the Inner Glows set from the second drop-down menu in the Special Effects pane of the Artwork and Effects palette. Double-click the thumbnail labelled Small Noisy Border. This should look good, although it will be tinted yellow. Go to Layer, Layer Style, Style Settings. Click on the colour swatch under Glow, Inner and pick white. Then in the Layers palette, change the text layer's blending mode from Normal to Multiply. You can now add whichever image or texture you like on to the Background and the text should 'print' on to it.

7 For serious distressing, you are going to need to batter the outline of the lettering. To do this, go back to your original black text (make sure the text layer is selected in the Layers palette, not the Background), then go to Filter, Distort, Glass. Here you have to agree to simplify the text, which means rasterise it. Click OK and the Glass effect appears in the Filter Gallery window. The default settings are pretty good: 5, 3, Frosted, 100%. To batter the text more, increase the first slider (Distortion). Alternatively, stick to a low setting, click OK to apply it and then press Ctrl-F to repeat the filter; this gives a graduated effect. Keep pressing Ctrl-F until you are happy with the distressed effect.

8 The Lighting Effects filter, which you used in Step 5, isn't just for lighting effects. It can also produce bas-relief textures (where letters look as if they've been etched in stone) using bump mapping, a process that converts light and shade into 3D relief. A couple of preparatory steps are needed before you do this. First, hold the Ctrl key and click on your text layer's thumbnail in the Layers palette. A flashing marquee appears around the lettering. Press Ctrl-D to make it go away again. This may sound silly, but the reason will soon become clear.

Next, give Lighting Effects something with which to work. It likes graduations, not hard edges. Starting once more with plain text, go to Filter, Blur, Gaussian Blur. Click OK to rasterise the type. Set the Radius large enough to blur the

edges of the lettering visibly, but not too much. Try 4 or 5, and less if you are working at smaller sizes. Click OK to apply this.

9 Next, add some texture. Go to Filter, Noise, Add Noise. You need to set a fairly hefty Amount, such as 25%, and then choose Gaussian, Monochromatic. Click OK and then go back to Gaussian Blur and blur the noise just a little – about half the previous amount. Finally, press Ctrl-L to open the Levels palette. Drag the grey marker from the middle of the scale almost all the way to the left, leaving the lettering pale grey.

10 Lighting Effects doesn't work well with transparent layers, so merge the lettering with the Background by pressing Ctrl-E. Then go to Filter, Effects, Lighting Effects. Leave the big floodlight setup you created earlier, but increase Intensity and decrease Ambience. At the bottom of the dialog box, click on the Texture Channel drop-down menu and choose any of your image's colour channels (Red, Green or Blue); for grey artwork, it doesn't matter which. Untick 'White is high' and drag the Height slider to Mountainous. Click OK to apply the effect.

11 You now have bumpy bevel-edged text, but the edges don't look quite right. Press Shift-Ctrl-D to reload the marquee selection you made earlier. Your lettering is thicker now, so go to Select, Modify, Expand, and enter an amount slightly larger than you blurred by in Step 8; try 7 if you blurred by 5, for example. Click OK. Press Shift-Ctrl-I to invert the selection and then press Delete. Press Shift-Ctrl-I to invert it back, then go to Layer, New, Layer Via Cut.

12 If you want to colour your text, press Ctrl-U for Hue/Saturation. Tick Colorize and then adjust Hue to change the colour and Saturation to make it more or less vivid. Click OK to apply. Since your lettering is now back in its own layer, you could also add a Layer Style. Have fun experimenting. 

